

Mural comes back to life



Tarmo Hannula

Watsonville artist Guillermo Aranda (second from left) helps direct the mural restoration project, as youth from the community volunteer their labor.

By TARMO HANNULA

STAFF WRITER

THANKS to neighborhood involvement, a few grants and a dedicated mural artist, the longest standing mural in Watsonville is about to be revitalized.

On the southern wall of the Mona Lisa Restaurant at the corner of Rodriguez and Front streets, a massive mural depicting various scenes of community integration, Folklorico dancers, and ancient Mayan and Aztec symbols, is about to be sand-blasted away. However, a group of Watsonville residents, have joined forces with the Brown Berets, the Student Empowerment Movement and Watsonville artist Guillermo Aranda to re-create the mural.

"This is the oldest outdoor mural in Watsonville," said Luis Angel Alejo of the Brown Berets. "What we are doing here, through a joint community effort, is tracing the mural on paper. Then the wall will be sand-blasted, repainted, and then we will redo the mural on a fresh clean wall."

Alejo said the mural was painted by UCSC student Alex Louis Espinoza in the early 1970s. "The mural has faded and the wall is coming apart," Alejo said. "Thanks to so many people in the neighborhood — even passersby who just want to get involved — this mural will survive."

Watsonville artist Guillermo Aranda, who was in charge of the

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Cynthia Gomez, 6, is delighted with her work of outlining a figure of a man in one small section of the mural.

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mural project that now covers one wall of the La Manzana center on West Lake Avenue, is heading the Mona Lisa project as well. On Friday Aranda, surrounded by a large group of neighborhood youths, feverishly taped up sheets of tracing paper on top of the faded mural and carefully copied, line for line, the original art.

"First we outlined everything that we could with dark markers," Aranda said. "That makes it easier to trace the work." Several young children, smaller than some of the figures depicted in the mural, ran their magic markers accurately across the tracing paper. Some of the older youth sat perched on a scaffolding to reach the higher points.

Alejo said a turning point in the restoration project was a \$5,000 grant from the Santa Cruz Community Foundation. Another grant — \$1,500 — came in from the Watson-

ville Parks and Recreation Department.

"We are still in need of financial help," Alejo said. "Any organization or community group that wants to add to this restoration project is certainly welcome."

Alejo stressed the importance of neighborhood collaboration. He added that in the 20-plus years of the mural's life only one incident of graffiti vandalism has occurred. "We were able to determine by the style of the graffiti that it was done by an outsider, someone not from this area," he said.

"There is a great deal of pride in this project," Alejo said. "You can tell by the out-pouring of community involvement."

According to Alejo, Espinoza died of natural causes a week after the mural was completed. "Fortunately, we have photographs of the work and the artist when the mural was completed," Alejo said. "Now our community is bringing it back to life."

For those interested in making a donation to the mural project, contact Luis Angel Alejo at 761-5335.